

ARCHIVES EXPLORED

Content marketing platform that
added millions to pipeline





This is a bittersweet project for me. I worked on it for five years, and it achieved far more than I ever thought it would when I began refining the idea.

Early in 2025, Cengage had a restructure. The new management decided to move the majority of it behind a paywall, and to get rid of some of it entirely. On one hand, I'm proud that it brought enough value to be moved; on the other hand, this decision completely defeats the object of its existence and will massively reduce the value it brings, and it is sad to see its legacy get cut short.

Thankfully, one of the greatest inventions on the internet, the Wayback Machine, has the pre-paywalled pages archived. All the links I supply will go to the most recent archived version, so I apologise if the links take a while to load, and if some of the links to the product itself don't work anymore.



WHY IT HAPPENED

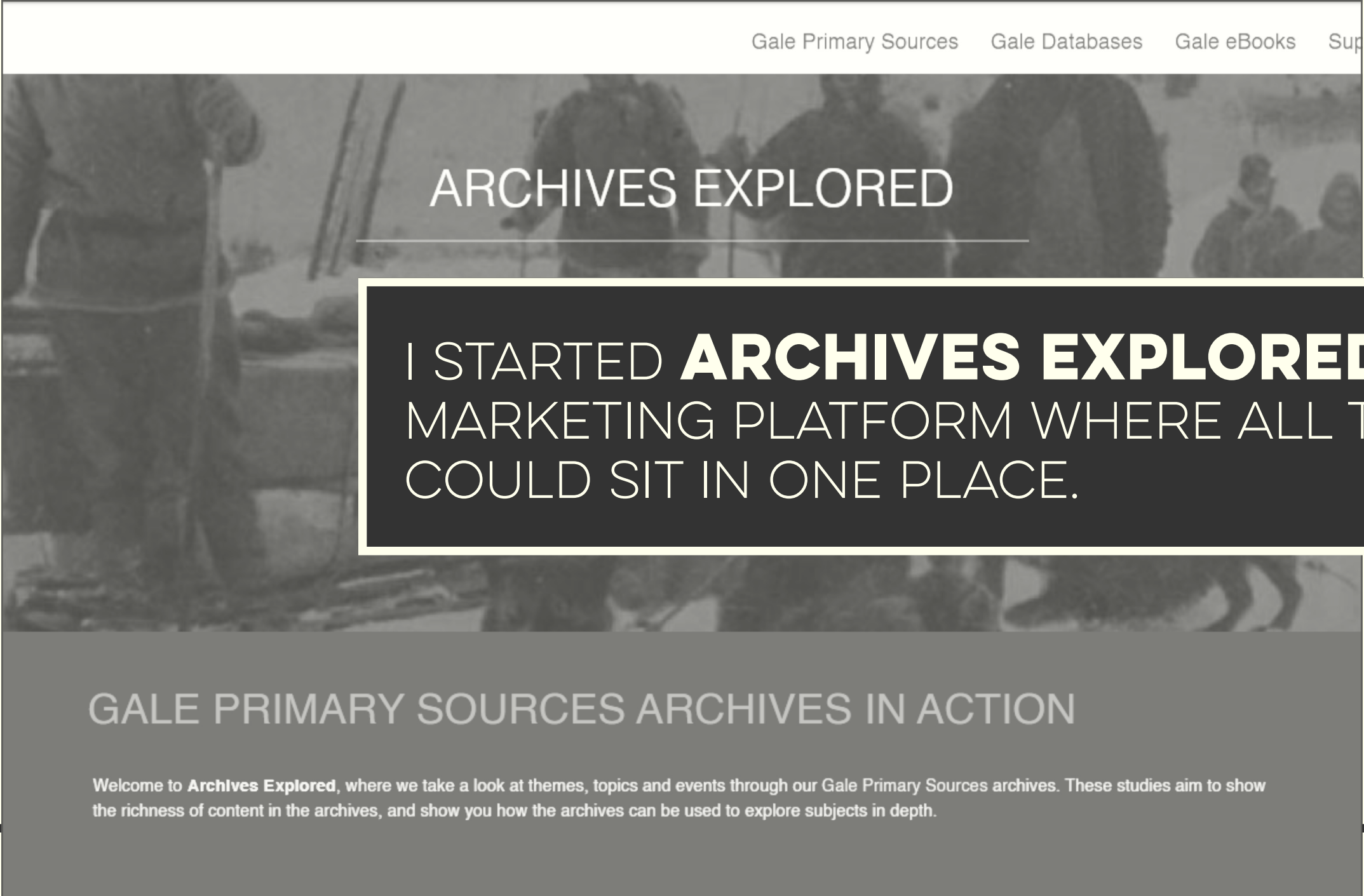
Lead generation had plateaued, and there were not enough opportunities entering the pipeline. To me, the cause of this problem was obvious: there was no marketing activity designed to help conversion from the top of the funnel (ToFU) to the middle of the funnel (MoFU); the existing marketing was purely product promotion, which did nothing to move prospects and customers from consideration to interest.

I knew the answer was to introduce content marketing. This would be an ideal method for demonstrating utility without it coming across as overtly promotional; it could be educational rather than the advertorial. It could also address another problem that I had noticed, which was generating demand beyond the purchasers; both organically and via sales, it could be used to engage the end users who were very influential in purchase decisions.

At the same time, we had also taken on a SEO agency who I was managing the relationship with, and leading on SEO and SEM as part of my role in a wider digital transformation project. This was great, as they were also behind my idea for content marketing as we both knew the benefits it would bring to this project as well. It was an easy decision to make content marketing one of the core pillars of our SEO efforts, so I began work.



WHAT I DID



[CLICK IMAGE TO VIEW]



WHAT I DID

I developed the brand identity and positioning, which was the archives “in action”. The name and tagline immediately told users what it is doing, why it was there, and how it filled the gap that prospects and customers wanted closing.

I designed an architecture that would follow content marketing best practices while making the most SEO impact. There would be a combination of short- and long-form content, hero and hygiene content, and “evergreen” content that would have perpetual search interest alongside “reactive” content that would capitalise on bursts of search activity.

The content came from two sources. The first was original content I created myself, written from scratch. The second was repurposing existing documents into webpages, such as essays written by prominent academic experts that were hidden within the products, and various presentations and case studies.



WHAT I DID

Within the first year, over 120 essays had been added to Archives Explored, and I had created over 100 pages of original content spanning multi-page long form pieces and single-page short form ones, which had become the Long Reads and Quick Reads sections of the platform.

The feedback from other functions was very positive: sales were saying how useful it had been in their meetings and negotiations, helping to move deals forward; and the North America office had started guiding their customers to the International website to view them!

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LONG READS

Our Long Reads show how primary sources can be used when researching broad topics.

Primary sources can expand a research project, uncover new ideas, and produce new conclusions that add to existing materials. In these pieces, we apply our archives to topics to show how they can supplement existing research, become a platform to explore under-researched areas within an overall topic, and

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QUICK READS

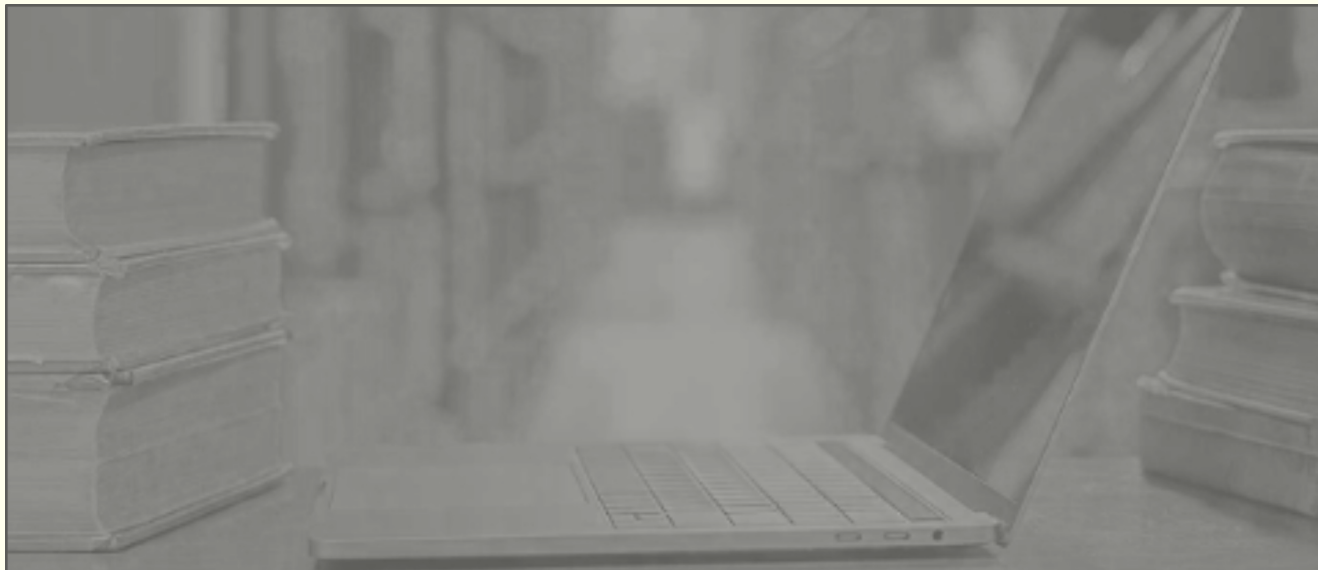
Our Quick Reads show how primary sources can be used to generate unique research.

Have you ever wondered if a research topic has enough material? These short pieces explore an unconventional topic using our archives, showing that many research ideas have more material to work with than you might think...



WHAT I DID

This prompted an expansion to fill other areas prospects and customers were interested in. I began commissioning content from internal colleagues and external partners, taking it beyond product utility to wider contextual information such as production processes, how product commissioning decisions were made, lists of partner institutions, and a particularly effective piece that explained the rationale behind pricing; all of which helped sales progress deals.



ARCHIVE PARTNERS

From the libraries of world-leading universities to personal collections, from independent societies to the homes of national records, explore



BEHIND THE SCENES

How does a collection of physical documents become a fully-searchable digital primary source archive? If you are curious, you can find out more



I OWNED **EVERYTHING.
BUILT EVERY PAGE ON THE WEBSITE.
OPTIMISED ON-PAGE AND OFF-PAGE SEO.
WRITING, EDITING, PROOFREADING.**

**I EVEN BRANCHED INTO **MULTIMEDIA
CONTENT** IN THE FINAL YEAR, MAKING A
VIDEO TO ACCOMPANY A SHORT-FORM
PIECE AND CONVERTING A SALES MEETING
INTERVIEW INTO A **PODCAST**.**



[CLICK IMAGE TO WATCH THE VIDEO]



JOURNAL OF A PLAGUE YEAR

This curation of documents looks at the representation of the 1666 plague in Daniel Defoe's work, allowing to ask whether, and how, the representation and experience of large-scale diseases has changed.

[Read more »](#)

[CLICK IMAGE TO LISTEN TO THE PODCAST]

In May 2022, we interviewed three academics about the role that Gale Primary Sources has in their research, teaching, and assessment. The conversation covered many topics, including the benefits of digital humanities and digital resources; how archives can be used to form and guide research projects; how they use digital primary sources in the classroom; and where they see the future role of primary sources in the evolving area of assessment.

The answers were varied and gave both agreements and differences, especially in how they have utilized primary sources in teaching and how they have used them in assessments. If you are curious about what they had to say, you can listen to the audio recording of the interview, or read their responses to the questions below.



Bob Nicholson

I'm a public historian who specialises in the history of nineteenth-century popular culture. My research covers a broad range of topics, including the histories of popular entertainment, humour, gender, sport, print culture, and transatlantic relations. I am also a keen exponent of the digital humanities and have published widely on digital research methods. I trained at the University of Manchester where I completed a BA in History (2007), MA in Victorian Studies (2008), and an AHRC-funded PhD exploring the role played by newspapers in shaping Victorian ideas about the United States (2012). While finishing my doctoral project I obtained a 6 month lectureship at Swansea University before joining Edge Hill in the summer of 2012. Find out more.



Tom Tunstall-Allcock

Tom Tunstall Allcock specialises in modern American history with a particular focus on the history of U.S. foreign relations. Before arriving at Manchester he taught at the University of Nottingham. Tom completed his PhD at Cambridge in 2012, during which he spent a year at Yale University as a Fox International Fellow. He previously studied at the University of Nottingham and Louisiana State University.



Jaap Verheul

Prof.dr. Jaap Verheul is associate professor of cultural history and honorary professor of Transatlantic Relations at Radboud University in Nijmegen. He teaches Transatlantic, transnational and cultural history. American universities. He has published on American, Dutch and transatlantic cultural history. He edited *Dreams of Paradise, Visions of Apocalypse: Utopia and Dystopia in American Culture* (2004) and co-edited *American Multiculturalism After 9/11: Transatlantic Perspectives*. (2009) and *Discovering the Dutch: On Culture and Society of the Netherlands* (2010). His latest book is *The Atlantic Pilgrim: John Lothrop Motley and the American Discovery of the Netherlands* (Boom, 2017).

£9 MILLION PIPELINE CONTRIBUTION

**+10% YEAR-ON-YEAR
WEBSITE TRAFFIC**

**2ND BIGGEST LEAD SOURCE
WITHIN FIVE YEARS**



After five years, Archives Explored had **over 600 pages of optimised content** (over 400 original content); the overall platform was getting **over a million cumulative views across all pages every year**; and it had consistently **increased website traffic by at least 10% year on year**.

Within those five years it had become the **second biggest lead generator**, and in the final year it had played a role in **over £9 million of pipeline**. It had provided a huge competitive advantage, as no comparable business had anything close to it.

My personal highlight was my Berlin Wall piece, which stayed in the top 20 SERPs for over three years, occasionally outranking powerhouses like National Geographic and the BBC: not bad for one guy in a niche B2B company!